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ABSTRACT

This paper summarizes the findings of a ten-year longitudinal research study of attitude changes among faculty resulting, at least partially, from their collective bargaining experience. The study focused on Henry Ford Community College (Michigan), using the participant-observation approach. A number of techniques for gathering qualitative information were employed, including direct observation, informant interviewing, document analysis, direct participation, and attitudinal survey. In addition, the study was based on the assumption that social conflict generated as a consequence of efforts toward a faculty constitution and a faculty contract, contains within itself certain elements which tend to ameliorate the conflict and give it a tolerable style. The study thus attempted to apply the principles of Clark and the propositions of Coser. Results of the study are reported in an itemized fashion in accordance with the principles and propositions of Clark and Coser. Overall, the study found that faculty attitudes had shifted from hostile and conflict-oriented to aggressive and resolution-oriented, thereby lending support to the notion that collective bargaining, through the grievance process, can be viewed as a viable dispute-resolving mechanism. Further, and with few exceptions, the attitudes and perceptions of faculty and administration were found to be very similar on most matters. (Author/JDS)

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RESEARCH SUMMARY #4
March 1977

AN ANALYSIS OF SOME ASPECTS OF SOCIAL CONFLICT AT HENRY FORD COMMUNITY COLLEGE (1963-1973)

by
Ray A. Howe

We have selected this paper by Dr. Howe as our fourth Research Summary because it reports one of the few longitudinal studies of attitude change resulting at least partially from the collective bargaining experience.

Dr. Howe describes the shift in faculty attitude, at one institution, from hostile and conflict-oriented to aggressive and resolution oriented. One indentifiable sign of this maturation described in Dr. Howe's own words is that: "The grievance process... has gone beyond the mere enforcement of contract... It has become a mechanism for the solution of problems ." This lends some support to those who have suggested that collective bargaining can be viewed as a viable dispute resolving mechanism.

Administrators and researchers alike should find this pilot study both valuable as a starting point for similar case studies and reassuring, in its content and tone, that educational communities through joint effort can make collective bargaining a sound instrument of goal oriented academic management.

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The purpose of this study is to examine one college in respect to a changing thrust by an active faculty towards formal recognition of faculty authority, first through the attainment of a faculty constitution based on traditional collegiate precepts and then, followed quickly by the invocation of collective bargaining.

Henry Ford Community College was selected as an object of study for several basic reasons. First, it was and is a relatively stable institution. Second, it has been consistently, since its very inception, an institution in which administration and faculty alike have stressed the significance of the traditional collegiate concepts of "shared authority." Third, despite the traditions of governance, the faculty was among the first and perhpas was the first in the nation to opt for collective bargaining. It was certainly the first to be formally recognized under law as a bona fide collective bargaining agent. It was the first collegiate faculty in the United States to undertake a strike as an outgrowth of collective bargaining and was also the first faculty to experience two strikes in two successive years. Fourth, this faculty has undergone a variety of auxiliary experiences related to collective bargaining, including mediation, fact finding and court proceedings. It has, therefore, manifested faculty militancy and has endured significant social conflict in consequence. Yet it remains a quality faculty, a mature faculty and a faculty committed to a comprehensive community college, prepared, even eager, to adapt program to meet the evolving needs of the community and/or the student.

The study of collective bargaining, however, was but one aspect of this undertaking, which is rather to examine the interactional implications of efforts and accomplishments to effect a re-definition of faculty functions in one community college respecting relationships of the faculty with the administration and the Board of Trustees of that institution.

The decade encompassed in this study was not chosen arbitrarily but does reflect an identifiable era of faculty activism which, in one form or another, remained continuingly in action throughout the decade.

The approach is that of the participant-observer, cognizant of the pitfalls and possibilities inherent in this manner of operation. A number of techniques were employed: direct observation, which took place over the entire period; informant interviewing; document analysis; respondent interviewing; and attitudinal survey; and direct participantion, also extensive.

The relative stability of staff at the institution allowed for interviews with many who experienced the events of the entire decade, yet the presence of some "new" staff allowed also for the possibility of comparison and contrast of perceptions between those whose experience was total and partial.

The data were relatively intact, whether those of the institution or the faculty organization, and a body of external commentary via the local press was available.

Such a study as this does not lend itself to statistical summaries of any substance. It inclines to a search for human relationships and an understanding of attitudes. While such must, of course, be documented, they cannot be warranted to a high degree of validity. They are best evidenced in behavioral tendencies and, more concretely, in behavioral patterns, especially those which demonstrated consistency. This can be accomplished through historical narrative, laced with analysis.

The summary statements were descriptive and individual rather than projective and general. They relate only to Henry Ford Community College and in this particular decade. The results may, however, constitute a pilot project for comparative studies with other singular institutional experiences.

The study is based upon the assumption that the social conflict generated as a consequence of efforts toward a faculty constituion and a faculty contract, contains within itself, as does all social conflict, certain elements which tend to ameliorate the conflict and give it a tolerable style. This study is an attempt to apply six principles enunciated by Burton Clark as existent within the traditional academic structure and sixteen propositions produced by Lewis Coser, deriving from a more generalized theoretical consideration of social conflict.

In the course of this study six basic factors cited by Burton Clark, each of which was advanced by Clark as a mechanism of adjustment which served either to reduce conflict or give it a tolerable style, were applied to a decade in the history of Henry Ford Community College with the following results:

1. A separation of powers has taken place. This is explicit in the Faculty Consititution and is implicit in collective bargaining. Such separation of powers is recognized as an ameliorative influence. Even though its effectiveness was not adjudged to be high, it is still noted to have had effect. The designated spheres of influence are formed in some instances and tacit in others, and do not cover all facets of the collegiate enterprise, yet their existence and the persistence of their existence are worthy of note.

2. Joint appointment between the administration and the faculty was found to be effective in at least one manifestation. While little of this is seen at the dean level of administration or above, or in the administrators who provide essential services to the college at large, the division head-department chairman echelon, that no-man's land between faculty and administrative status, must be given much credit for maintaining a residue of tolerance and a reservoir of reconciliation. As Clark has observed of such an administrator, 'Much of conflict-reduction comes out of his hide."

3. The bureaucratization of faculty, the situation in which systems and channels have been elaborated, proceeds apace. The faculty has its general organization and its Faculty Senate, its committees and its sole bargaining agent. The administration has its hierarchy which reaches out towards every corner of the college. An Executive Council exists as a middle ground. While the effectiveness of such a system may be legitimately questioned, the channels still are employed, and while muddled, may by this very condition provide a saving grace. However their ponderous pace may irritate, these structures still attract new ideas, still offer deliberation, still de-fuse and perhaps diffuse the impulsive, knee-jerking reaction, which might otherwise be more intemperately advanced. Although the process may be best described as distillation, since it dribbles out in condensed form that which entered it in volume, having been vaporized along the way, its wearing and wearying demands in transit through circuitous coils do serve to absorb and dissipate heat.

4. The existence of an oligarchy in the faculty is acknowledged and its influence recognized. Such an oligarchy functions principally to react to the initiative of others, assuring that proposals that undertake to project sudden new directions are tempered by review, review in which questions based upon experience are asked and answered and in which all facets of faculty opinion are weighed. Such an oligarchy does not do the administration's will, nor does it seek to serve the administration's ends. It is however, within the faculty, an administrative surrogate, tending to assure faculty responsibility.

5. There has been, over the years, a demonstrable disengagement of interest and withdrawal of personnel. This is evident in the absence from the current scene of the preponderance of the activists of the early years of the decade under study. Their absence tends to reduce the potential for conflict.

Similarly however, a more current application is evident in the reflection of the incumbent president of the Henry Ford Community College Federation of Teachers, the bargaining agent. The spontaneous and broad outpouring of active support in the infancy of collective bargaining at HFCC is, by his admission, somewhat on the wane. This factor reduces the capacity of the HFCC-FT insofar as it requires more work to be done by a relative few and taxes them to, even beyond, their limits of time and energy.

6. There has been, beyond question, an institutionalization and/or formalization of conflict through which what otherwise might have been raw conflict has been transformed. As Clark foresaw, "Law, or an approximation of it...", has moved in at HFCC. This has been reflected in collective bargaining and in the Faculty Constitution. Documented rules and regulations have increased and the status of those previously existent has been more specifically ascribed. Further, their change has been made a much more laborious process. The conflict has also been transformed to a meeting of champions, between whom the encounters have become increasingly civil and conciliatory, even when agreement is elusive.

Thus, in varying measures, it was established that each of Clark's so-called mechanisms had application here in something akin to the sense he projected. They do not suffice, however, to explain all the ramifications of all of the major developments at HFCC.

In addition, this study also undertook to investigate the propriety of sixteen propositions adduced by Lewis Coser as "functions" of conflict to the period and the pressures. These have been examined.

1. The conflict that has occured at HFCC seems, very demonstrably, to have effected a greater sense of identity on the part of each of the elements involved in the conflict, as well as a greater sense of unity. This has not taken place in equal measure for each group and each group may have a somewhat differing perception as to the extent of development in the other. It has been noted, however, in all. Specific attention regarding this proposition was concentrated on the period during which the college has engaged in collective bargaining.

2. The existence of conflict at HFCC has allowed for, indeed provided for, the venting of hostilities, frustrations and dissents.

This occurs at two levels.

The constituencies themselves, in the process of formulation of their programs and positions, seek the broadest input possible. Screening or editing of the gross input is accomplished in such a manner as to give voice to all points of view.

The negotiating teams who meet at the bargaining table spend a good deal of time reviewing and discussing all items before them. Thus a second opportunity for venting is available.

All parties to the conflict attest, and do so with the same emphasis, that these opportunities do serve as a "safety-valve." thus draining off sentiments which otherwise might have led to more general or more intensive conflict.

3. The conflict at HFCC in its origination and its development, does seem to have been realistic. Realistic conflicts in this context are those which arise from in Coser's words, "...frustration of specific demands within the relationship and from estimates of gains of the participants, and which are aimed at the presumed frustrating object...". Non-realistic conflicts "...are not occasioned by the rival ends of the antagonists, but by the need for tension release of at least one of them."

There can be little doubt but that the conflict at this institution, as perhaps at any other, does have unrealistic aspects. The frustrations of the faculty are many and varied and in both the pursuit of the Faculty Constitution and the undertaking of collective

bargaining some faculty throughout, and many faculty at times, have sought such tension relief in conflict. Indeed, in each succeeding set of negotiations some demands have been advanced solely for the sake of their discussion and, discussion accomplished, they drop by the wayside. This practice, however, has visibly diminished with the passing years and it is apparent that the HFCC-FT, through its editing process within its own ranks, has reserved more and more its listing of initial demands, submitted at the outset of each new round of bargaining, to those on which it seeks to acquire practical, tangible progress.

In the main, the record clearly indicates the realistic thrust. Collective bargaining at HFCC has produced a relatively sparse contract, restricted primarily to wages, hours and conditions of employment rather conservatively defined, leaving much to collegial determination.

The eminent issues at the bargaining table have involved salary, fringe benefits, calendar, extra-contractual assignment and rate, workload, seniority, reductions in force, leaves, travel-conference funds, grievance procedures, the work day, month and year, etc. Concentration at the table has been on the concrete rather than the abstract.

4. The parties to the conflict appear to distinguish between hostility and aggressiveness, espousing the latter and eschewing the former. This is, of course, far from universal. Some hostility does exist but it is apart from the mainstream of the conflict. Such hostilities are more evident and more acceptable in time of crisis but, the crisis over, they are once again very quickly shunted into the background.

There is no indication that hostility is created for effect. Such expression as does occur seems genuine and sincere. It is far more possible that postures of aggressiveness may be assumed to promote bargaining advantage but this seldom intrudes on the bargaining sessions themselves. The restraint evidenced may be a matter of the coincidence of the convergence of individual styles more inclined to low profile, quiet exchange, but the persistence of the approach, when coupled with the fact that there is a recognizable turnover of personnel at the table from year to year, seems to imply that it is a reflection of the cumulative acquisition of sophistication in the conflict processes.

5. There have been, at HFCC, some social relationships between the contending parties and between the active agents of the contending parties which are broadly recognized and which are believed to be an explanatory factor in the emergence of an intertwined cooperation-conflict pattern. The record indicates that, almost without exception, possibilities for cooperation and cooperative solution, have been considered at all stages of conflict, including the most extreme, and in many cases have produced, even under pressure, acceptable resolution of some extremely difficult issues.

6. Whether or not the closeness of association has contributed to the sharpness of conflict is not clear. The inclination is to assert that it does not. Yet such closeness does permit candor and frankness in exchange which may, at times, evoke irritations at least in the short run. Some such effect may also derive from the dichotomy between personal commitments, which are as a consequence of such association well known, and the stance taken as a reflection of the institutional or organizational role one is obliged to play. In general, however, the application of this proposition to the HFCC situation seems limited.

7. The HFCC experience has been such that, as the conflict has evolved, each party has chosen its representation at the bargaining table carefully so as to maximize the probabilities of success, as these are considered in the light of previous experience. This has led to the selection of individuals who incline to the avoidance of the dramatic in favor of the reasonable settlement. Such a development has occurred on both sides of the table, quite independently, but highly consciously in each case. The result may not have been the reduction of time involved in negotiations but it has seemingly increased its productivity. It has certainly altered its tenor.

This development may be viewed as one more manifestation of a high degree of consensus between faculty and administration. There is no indication that the two parties do contend on the basic assumptions on which the relationship is founded. Such conflict as is evident concerns itself principally, if not exclusively, with how such assumptions should be implemented and the degree to which and the dispatch with which they can be implemented.

There does remain, within each group, some deep reservation concerning the depth of commitment of the other. Faculy and administration alike are concerned that the other may be confused in its priorities and misdirected in its emphasis. Some emotionalism does attach to this. There are discernible gaps in communications.

8. The continuity of conflict at HFCC has often been regarded by outsiders as prima facie evidence of schism. This does not seem to have been the case. Opportunities for the overt revelation of discomfort or distress abound. The conflict is, in a sense, continual. Yet, these allow for the possibility of correction. Speaking of the present president of the college, one union leader said,

> "He will make decisions. They are not always good or well-advised decisions, but they are a basis for action. There may be no change in the track record of success in resolving matters internally with the new administration, but there's less effort involved."

Both formal and informal avenues are pursued, sometimes simultaneously.

The image of the faculty-administrative relationship may be one of contention. The reality seems more to be that of a dynamic equilibrium, as contrasted with a static one, a reflection of the inertia of motion.

9. The faculty sees itself as more centralized as a result of conflict, but is more moderate in its acknowledgment of its own centralization in faculty. On the other hand, administration does not percieve itself as being more centralized. It does not disagree with the statement that it is so, but neither can it quite bring itself to agree. The faculty, however, regards the administration as more centralized, perhaps as a matter of relative degree. These conflicting views of emphases may suggest a lack of communication.

10. Intolerance does not seem to have been a by-product of the decade of conflict at HFCC. Feelings did run rather high in the immediate aftermath of the strikes of 1966 and 1967 towards those who chose to cross the picket lines, but these, in general, seem to have subsided with what union leaders characterize as "surprising rapidity." The residue is largely a reflection of scattered individual resentment aimed at selected individuals within the group. The dispersion of faculty reaction to this idea is, of itself, a reflection of such individualism which would evoke the antipathy of others were there a solid "party line" regarding such conduct.

Dissent in the formulation of faculty policy and in the process of affirmation of faculty action has always been provided for, actively present and even encouraged. No stigma has ever visibly attached to such conduct.

The administrative perception seems somewhat at odds with the faculty view, but in the direction of a greater denial of the presence of intolerance. This may indicate a lack of sensitivity or of observation, but at the same time it reflects the inclination of the administration to attribute a charity to the faculty which it is not quite sure it has.

11. Neither administration nor faculty at HFCC may legitimately be described as a rigid struggle group. Nor is there any evidence which would indicate that either party set out to identify enemies solely for the purpose of the creation of unity or cohesion. Such a unity and cohesion among faculty has taken place, more clearly in times of crisis, but the threats seemed not of their own making and, in the main, were real and substantial. The idealism which still persists in the faculty may contribute to a readiness to over react to some situations but in any instance where such has appeared the leadership has functioned as a stabilizing element.

The administration, too, has on occasion perceived threat and has overreacted in some instances. These perceptions were not, however, of deliberate construction on the administration's part, but rather seemed reflective of budgetary concerns and of the strange nature of relationship between the Board, the district central office and the college administration.

12. Collective bargaining, and the conflict attached thereto, does essentially take place between champions, or more accurately between teams of champions. These teams are present at the negotiating table as agents of constituencies and not to advance personal convictions. The early years with strikes in the first two, may have augured for a more radical and merciless conflict than has subsequently transpired. Here the realization of the representation of a constituency may well have been a contributing factor. But the evidence is that in the course of the second strike a general transformation occurred.

The realization seems to have been achieved that the collective bargaining process, despite all its stresses and strains, was at base a means to agreement through hard negotiations tempered with accommodation. When this stance was reciprocated, a mutual effort was generated which has remained, relatively sustained, through four succeeding sets of negotiations.

Collective bargaining, calling as it does for collective representation, requires the setting aside of personal preferences in favor of those of the group represented. This depersonalization may serve a variety of purposes, but among them, it certainly allows for a degree of detached analysis of realistic limits to even the most worthy aspirations and acceptance of these, however grudgingly. Such seems to have been the case as HFCC.

Some considerable degree of mutual understanding and mutual respect seems to have been generated. While a recognizable degree of anti-administrative feeling persists, it has apparently existed not only in the pre-bargaining but the pre-Constitution periods.

Some tendency is evident to identify individual "villains," sometimes accurately, sometimes not. Without regard for the accuracy of the assessments, such identifications seemed to have served a contributory function, in that they allowed for the continued commitment to the process of collective bargaining with the attribution of its faults to some of the practitioners and not to the pattern.

13. Collective bargaining at HFCC has taken place within a context composed of may varied relationships between the constituencies and elements thereof. These have continued to survive, and even expand. Out of these has come a hodge-podge of norms; some contractual, some extra-contractual; some formally accomplished, some informally

created; some explicit some implicit; some as a consequence of the bargaining era, some preceding it.

The most significant change in this regard has been the fact that collective bargaining has brought a great deal more attention to the existence of these norms, new or old, coupled with a dogged insistence that they be respected and observed.

The grievance process at HFCC has gone beyond the mere enforcement of contract, which is its nominal reason for existence. It has become a mechanism for the solution of problems. Not all problems raised in grievance have been resolved through grievance procedures. The raising of such problems has led to a realization of a continuing need for the reexamination of the efficacy of corollary functions of the college, and of the effectiveness of not only professional but personal relationships as well.

14. The responses of both faculty and administration demonstrate rather clearly that, on a perceptual level at least, each has become distinctly aware of the importance of the unity of the other. The evidence of the collective bargaining experience corroborates that this realization has been reflected on a practical level. Agreements achieved at the table are always tentative subject to ratification of the respective constituencies of the agents that drafted the agreement. Consequently, as settlement seems to be imminent, both agents undertake to assure that the fullest understandings exist which would provide basis for the justifications of compromises effected.

15. Testing of strength has been an inherent part of the conflict at HFCC from its inception. The testing of credibility was a vital part of the strikes which accompanied the first two rounds of collective bargaining. This may have been accomplished in the wee hours of the morning near the end of the second strike, indeed, in its final hours. Such testing is never final. It must, from time to time, recur in order that credibility be confirmed. Such devices as extended negotiations, use of mediation services and, on one occasion, the appearance of the chairman of the Board's finance committee as a resource person at a critical point, have all been employed. In addition, this has been a function of "sidebar," the adjunct to formal bargaining, in which mutually trusting individuals exchange privately significant questions and comments as the "crunch" approaches. Both parties at HFCC recognize the value of this and accept it with equanimity.

16. The conflict at HFCC has witnessed a profusion and and a variety of coalitions and associations, none of a sustained nature, each of which has served, or seemed to serve, some contributory purpose at the time of its inception. The majority of these have been at HFCC, internal. The parties have felt reasonably comfortable in reliance on their own resources. On a few occasions, and for limited purposes, there have been external coalitions and/or associations. In one instance the entire community was involved.

Interest groups and active individuals have emerged for a period of time but there is, as yet in the experience, no evidence of the enduring existence of faction.

The existence of such a fluid state in the exercise of powe. has been generally regarded as a saving grace, and the history of the relationship supports this view.

One generalized conclusion seems warranted. While not every one of Coser's propositions has been revealed to have been applicable to the decade of conflict at HFCC, the significant majority of them have been manifestly so.

This is evident in the data, in the unwritten but still determinable record, and in the perceptions of the participants. Of these three, perhaps the most significant may be the perceptions.

Thus, the perceptions of faculty and the perceptions of administrators, the principal protagonists in this drama, have importance. They are supported by the other elements of the research.

Clark seems to be supported.

Coser, likewise, seems to be supported, in at least twelve of the sixteen propositions.

One additional conclusion of this study seems required. The perceptions of faculty and administration were sought primarily in an effort to shed light on the applicability of Clark's and Coser's propositions. There is, however, an important incidental by-product.

What emerged reveals that with only a few exceptions, the attitudes and perceptions of faculty and administration at HFCC on almost all matters examined were very similar to each other.

It is not justifiable to say that social conflict in this institution in this era produced consensus through collective bargaining. It is safe to say, however, that consensus can, and in this instance does, exist in substantial degree, continued, lengthy, and sustained confict in general and collective bargaining in particular notwithstanding.

Such a statement may have some significance to the immediate future of Henry Ford Community College, and more especially to those individuals at the college on either side of the table, to whom this may come as something of a surprise.

It argues for the existence of a large measure of common ground, the joint occupance of which may promise possibility for further amelioration of issues in any contest that may arise in the months and years ahead.

Further, there is indication of a rather substantial degreee of consensus within the general faculty itself.

This relative lack of faculty deviation is true even when one considers the faculty response based on subdivisions which represent variation in age, in length of service at the college, involvement or non-involvement in negotiations, or variety of leadership function. While there is some variation in intensity of agreement, only in one (1) percent of the items are there visible exceptions of consensus on agreement.

Conflict has thus not removed the possibility of consensus either within or between the essential elements of conflict, at least not at this institution, in this period of time.

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